

Should a Christian Actor Participate in a Nude Love Scene?

An article by Kelsey Dallas in the Deseret News asks, "Can you be a Christian and play a sinful character on TV?"

Dallas then notes that "Alan Ritchson, the star of 'Reacher,' says you certainly can, and he's unhappy with 'supposed Christians' who have a problem with him taking on a 'morally ambiguous' role."

The article was triggered by a video by Ritchson, the hulking strong man who plays Jack Reacher in a new online TV series.

Ritchson is known as an unashamed Christian, because of which he has received flak for playing Reacher, a character who, while fighting against the bad guys, is hardly a paragon of holiness.

In response, Ritchson said, "I love playing Reacher. I love telling this story. I love playing a character who creates a kind of moral ambiguity that we should struggle against as we consider whether or not what he's doing is good all the time or morally right. I think that kind of thing is fun and fascinating, and I think escaping to that world as an audience, hopefully it's as enjoyable for you as it is for me to help bring it to life."

He added, "But it's funny to me how a lot of people criticize me, supposed Christians especially criticize me for playing Reacher, as if the only TV that should exist is seeing people silently folding their hands in the pew of a church. I mean, what kind of stories are we supposed to tell?"

I actually agree with him here. Christians should not be

limited to acting in Christian roles alone. Obviously.

But the bigger question is more basic: Are there *any* lines that a Christian actor should not cross?

For example, could a committed Christian be a porn star? The answer is obviously not.

The Word of God is entirely clear on this, as Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers: "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Eph. 5:1–3, NIV; many other verses could be cited).

It is forbidden for believers to engage in sexual acts outside of marriage (even if you're "acting") or for believers to intentionally make themselves objects of lustful desire (which is the very essence of porn). As Jesus, "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!" (Matt. 18:7)

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But what about something less extreme than porn? What about an actor participating in a love scene with partial nudity?

In the case of "Reacher," this is not an abstract question.

As one viewer asked in response to Ritchson's passionate and articulate video, how he could justify doing a love scene in the shower with a topless woman? (Ritchson's video garnered almost 1 million views in less than a week, with many professing Christians cheering him on.)

The Word of God makes clear that, while we are not to make personal judgments about one another, “The person with the Spirit [or, the spiritual person] makes judgments about all things” (1 Cor. 2:15), and the letter to the Hebrews speaks of “mature” believers “who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14b).

What, then, does God’s Word have to say? What is the standard of heaven? (For the record, I did reach out to Ritchson through his agent listed online, but without success.)

Let’s make this simple.

What if this were you or I filming this scene? Or what if this were your spouse? How would you feel before God? And could you say to Jesus, “Let’s sit down together and watch this partially nude love scene I just filmed?”

I understand that actors act. But as one commenter on my X account noted, “I believe it was John Piper who helped with this by saying when a man in a film is shot by a gun, the director yells cut and the ‘dead’ man gets up having played the charade of being shot. When a person shows their nude body in a film, that is not a charade, but the real thing.”

So, even though the couple is acting, there are the physical images that everyone sees—which are real, not pretend—and there is physical contact of an intimate nature between people who are not married. (If they were married, should this be put on display for the world to see? God forbid.)

Husbands, how would you feel if your wife was the actress in the scene? If she were the one topless, hugging and kissing another topless man for millions to see? (Or even for no one to see.)

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Wives, how would you feel if your husband were the one hugging

and kissing the topless woman?

Even if there was zero passion involved. Even if the presence of cameras and lights made the whole scene feel quite sterile in real life. The fact is that people are watching the scene—that's why it was filmed. And without a doubt, it would be sexually provocative to many watching it—and quite intentionally at that. And how could it not be defiling or compromising, at least on some level, for those acting the scene out?

If the Jesus you follow would say, "No big deal," then you're not following the Jesus of the Word.

Going one step further, if partial nudity is OK, why not complete nudity? And rather than simulated sex, why not real sex?

Again, I am not Alan Ritchson's personal judge. It is God's Word which judges us, and we both give account to Him.

More broadly, I'm not here to judge those who have struggled with porn or to condemn those who are involved with porn. Many of them are enslaved and want to be free. They need the Lord! And all of us, outside of God's grace and the blood of Jesus, are worthy of damnation. Even on our best days, we still fall short. I live by mercy too.

At the same time, God calls us to holiness and purity, not out of legalism or rule-keeping but out of love and because we belong to Him.

It's one thing to acknowledge God's standards and say, "Lord, I need help! I keep falling short." It's another to lower His standards. We do that to our own harm.

That's why many other Christian actors have refused to do sex scenes or nude scenes. For them, it meant a compromise of their faith.

After all, it is the pure in heart who will see God (Matt. 5:8) and without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Cor. 6:16–7:1).

And this: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

We do well to chew on these words. After all, they represent the heart of the God to whom we will all give account.

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